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SUBJECT: MAURITANIAN DETAINEES AT GUANTANAMO

¶1. The issue of the Mauritians currently detained at Guantanamo receives a relatively low key, but fairly steady, drumbeat of attention in this country. The three, all claimed to be of Mauritanian nationality, are listed in the press as Mohamedou Ould Salahi, described as having been turned over by the previous regime in 2001, and Ahmed Ould Abdel Aziz and Mohamed Lemine Ould Sidi Mohamed, described as having been arrested in Peshawar in 2002. A local committee exists called the Peoples Initiative for the Liberation of the Guantanamo Detainees. Often, when one attends human rights gatherings, the issue is mentioned. The National Order of Lawyers made a statement recently. The press will carry occasional articles. One Presidential candidate, Dahane Ould Ahmed Mahmoud, asked the Charge formally for the three to be released from Guantanamo and returned to Mauritania under whatever terms the two governments worked out. We promised to inform Washington of his request.

¶2. A group of U.S. and British lawyers representing two of the detainees visited Nouackhott earlier in the month to call attention to the detentions and ask that the GIRM request the USG for their release. They garnered a considerable amount of press attention as they alleged "inhumane conditions" and poor morale of the detainees, eliciting support from local NGOs like the Association of Human Rights in Mauritania and SOS-Esclaves. The three lawyers called on the Minister of Justice and the Commission for Human Rights, but the Government made no comment on their request. The group wrote President Vall asking the GIRM to request the return of the prisoners in exchange for a pledge to make an investigation as to whether they committed crimes against Mauritania and, if so, to put them on trial. The group also wrote the Charge, observing that the detentions are "causing much friction between the U.S. and the people of Mauritania" and expressing the hope that the USG will be receptive to an initiative from the GIRM for the return of their clients, subject to assurances.

¶3. A letter has been carried on an independent Mauritanian website subsequently from one of the detainees, Ahmed Abdel-Aziz, dated January 21, 2007, saying he is no longer a human being but is in the cemetery of the living dead. He describes terrible things having happened to him first at Bagram, then his transfer to Guantanamo, where he alleges other bad experiences. Abdel-Aziz expresses pride in being Mauritanian and the hope that Mauritanians will organize on behalf of their unjustly imprisoned citizens.

¶4. Post is pouching a copy of the letters to President Vall and the Charge to AF/W for disposition.

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